

# Homosexuality and the Bible

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## Quotations:

- *"I want God's gay and lesbian children to know of God's unconditional love and acceptance of them as well. We cannot find any condemnation in scripture for committed monogamous same-sex relationships."* Rev. Charles Copping, Chaplain of the Arizona Legislature in a letter to legislators, sent 2000-NOV-7, announcing that he is a gay male. <sup>1</sup>
  - *"The half-dozen biblical references to homosexuality do not reflect what we understand today about loving relationships. This is an identity, not a sin."* The Rev. Dan Johnson of Good Samaritan United Methodist Church in Edina, MN. <sup>2</sup>
  - *"The witness of the Bible is univocal about same sex sexual activity. It is always rejected as sinful. There is no distinction made between homosexual behavior that is part of the consensual acts of adults and other forms of such behavior."* Ben Witherington III. <sup>3</sup>
  - *"Homosexuality and sodomy are not ethical sins. No one is being hurt, no one is being cheated, nobody's rights are being infringed upon. Homosexuality is a religious sin, analogous to other Biblical prohibitions, like not eating the carcass of a dead animal, or not sleeping with a woman during her menstrual cycle."* Rabbi Shmuley Boteach <sup>4</sup>
  - *"In reality, there are no biblical literalists, only selective literalists. By abolishing slavery and ordaining women, millions of Protestants have gone far beyond biblical literalism. It's time we did the same for homophobia."* William Sloane Coffin <sup>5</sup>
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## Overview:

We must remember that the bible was written by men who were human. The bible is a collection of stories beginning with all creation, including Adam and Eve and the Garden of Eden and continuing through the birth and death of Jesus, onto the revelation and termination of everything as we know it. The Bible was compiled by the Church from bits and pieces of writing that earlier Jewish scholars and the Church Fathers believed to be inspired writing. Sometimes these stories were handed down from father to son to grandson and so on until someone actually wrote them down. These writings were and are the focus of study and scholarship (the "historical/critical method" of Biblical exegesis). At its best, this study -- coupled with reason and tradition -- informs a lively faith. As flawed as the history of the Jewish/Christian tradition is, it has always had at its core certain important basic principles. These can be summed up -- at least in part -- as responding to the love of the living God by living a righteous life. The various chapters were originally written as poems and letters in various languages including Greek, Hebrew and Arabic. All were assembled into one manuscript and translated into different languages, including English. Different religions utilized differently assembled manuscripts (i.e., the Christian Bible, the Jewish Torah, Muslim Quran, etc.). It's important to remember that neither God nor Jesus, wrote the bible and it wasn't transcribed from either of them word for word either. Also, when a document is translated from the original Greek, Hebrew and Arabic texts into

English or other languages, it's important to remember that meanings could possibly be lost or changed during the translations and interpretations.

In this article, biblical references to homosexuality are explained from both a conservative and liberal Christian perspective. Many English translations of the Bible, and the Hebrew / Greek original texts were analyzed. Although this article deals with mainly with Christianity, much of the material is valid for the liberal and conservative wings of other world religions.

English translations of the Bible clearly condemn various homosexual acts. Five Hebrew and Greek original texts definitely condemn homosexual prostitution in Pagan temples, and heterosexuals who engage in homosexual acts.

Interpretations of additional texts differ among Christians:

- **Religious liberals** have often interpreted other passages as condemning men who sexually abuse boys, or who engage in homosexual ritual sex in Pagan temples. They view the Bible as being silent on sexual behavior within a consensual, monogamous committed homosexual relationship.

*For example, they might identify the sin of the men of Sodom as explained in Genesis 19 as attempting to rape strangers. Alternatively, they might quote other biblical passages as proof that the main sin of that city was their uncharitable behavior towards strangers, and their uncaring conduct towards the poor, the widows, and needy.*

- **Religious conservatives** often interpret all of the Biblical passages that touch on same-sex activity as condemning homosexuality in all its forms.

*For example, they would probably identify homosexual behavior to be the sin of the men of Sodom. Homosexuality is seen as one of many manifestations of mankind's sinful nature which are a direct result of Adam and Eve's activities in the Garden of Eden. The story in Genesis is interpreted by conservative Christians as describing the fall of humanity.*

### Basic Approach to Analyzing the Bible:

The Bible refers to specific homosexual behaviors in a few passages. Before considering what the Bible might say about homosexuality in today's society, one must figure out what the authors of the Bible meant when they wrote their passages about homosexuality. In order to do this, one must make a fundamental decision -- whether to:

- Accept the entire teachings of one's faith group. If you do so, and if you follow a conservative denomination then you will probably be taught that homosexual behavior is chosen, changeable and condemned by God. It is something that a person does. If you follow a liberal faith group, you may well accept homosexuality as a, normal, unchangeable sexual orientation for a minority of humans. It is something that a person is.

- Study passages from your favorite English version of the Bible, which is filtered by the theological beliefs and homophobia (if any) of the translators. If so, then you will find passages in the Bible which condemn certain forms of homosexual behavior.
- Follow the ancient Hebrew, Aramaic or Greek writings and attempt to understand precisely what the writers taught. If so, then you will find that these same passages condemn specific homosexual activities (rape, prostitution, etc.) But the Bible appears to be silent about same-sex, committed, monogamous relationships.

There are two Hebrew words which are often associated with homosexual passages and which are mistranslated in many English versions of the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament):

- **qadesh** means a male prostitute who engaged in ritual sex in a Pagan temple. This was a common profession both in ancient Israel and in the surrounding countries. It is often mistranslated simply as "sodomite" or "homosexual." (e.g. the King James Version of the Bible, Deuteronomy 23:17). The companion word **quedeshaw** means female temple prostitute. It is frequently mistranslated simply as "*whore*" or "*prostitute*." A qadesh and quedeshaw were not simply prostitutes. They had a specific role to play in the temple. They represented a God and Goddess, and engaged in sexual intercourse in that capacity with members of the temple.
- **to'ebah** means a condemned, foreign, Pagan, religious, cult practice, but often simply translated as "*abomination*." Eating food which contains both meat and dairy products is "*to'ebah*" A Jew eating with an Egyptian was "*to'ebah*." A Jew wearing a polyester-cotton garment would be "*to'ebah*."

In order to understand what the Bible has to say on **heterosexual** activity, we could consult the original Hebrew texts, dividing all of the references to heterosexual sex into different categories:

- rape;
- sexual abuse of children;
- ritual sex in Pagan temples;
- prostitution;
- sexual orgies;
- non-exploitive, consensual, monogamous sex in a loving relationship, etc.

The final category is the only one that would help us understand what the Bible teaches about heterosexual activity in a committed relationship. After all, a verse which describes how an army kidnapped some female virgins for use as sex slaves does not tell us anything about the role of sex in marriage today. A verse that discusses temple prostitution during the worship of Pagan gods does not instruct us about feelings of romantic love between a man and a woman. Similarly, in order to comprehend what the Bible says about gay and lesbian relationships, we must pass over the references to homosexual rape, male sexual abuse of boys, and homosexual prostitution, orgies, Pagan sexual rituals in temples, etc. We would be left with only those references relating to consensual sexual activities within homosexual partnerships.

There are biblical descriptions of close and intimate relationships between members of the same gender. One is forced to conclude that the Bible often condemns heterosexual and homosexual

**exploitive, abusive, manipulative sex, and prostitution**, but is totally silent on consensual homosexual relationships.

**The Bible does contain:**

- Three stories of loving, same-sex relationships in the Bible involving David, Ruth and Daniel.
- A dozen or so oft-quoted passages about homosexual behavior in the Bible. Because conservative and liberal Christians interpreted the Bible very differently, they reach totally different conclusions about their meaning:
- Many conservative Christians interpret these passages as stating unambiguously that all homosexual behavior is forbidden, is an abomination, and is hated by God. It does not matter whether it is in the form of casual sex with a stranger, or sex within a committed, monogamous relationship. It is all sinful. Some consider it an "ordinary" sin -- in the same league as all other incorrect behavior, like lying, cheating or stealing. Others consider it such a serious sin that it will prevent gays and lesbians from attaining Heaven after death, even if they had previously been saved.
- Many liberal Christians largely ignore English translations of the Bible which are often heavily biased against homosexuality. They prefer to refer to the original Hebrew and Greek. They frequently interpret the following passages as condemning:
  - Homosexual rape (Genesis 19; Judges 19:14)
  - Homosexual ritual sex in Pagan temples -- a religious taboo (Leviticus 18:22 and Leviticus 20:13).
  - Homosexual prostitution (Deuteronomy 23:17; 1 Kings 14:24, 15:12, 22:46; 2 Kings 23:7)
  - Heterosexual men and women going against their basic nature and engaging in homosexual Pagan orgies (Romans 1: 26 *"For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature,"* Romans 1:27 *"And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet."*)
  - Bestiality: Men engaging in sex with males of another species -- angels in this case (Jude 7). Jude 7 refers to the people of Sodom as *"giving themselves over to fornication and going after strange flesh"*. Strange flesh has been variously translated as perverted sensuality, unnatural lust, lust of men for other men, and perversion. Again, it is unclear what is being referred to here. Some biblical scholars interpret this as referring to an ancient Jewish legend that the women of Sodom engaged in sexual intercourse with angels.

But on the topic of sexual activity within a loving, committed, monogamous homosexual relationship, the Bible as being completely silent.

One of the very few beliefs on which conservative and liberal Christians agree is that there are no definitive statements in the Bible which deal directly with same-sex marriages (aka domestic partnerships, civil unions, holy unions, etc.)

The books in the Christian Scriptures were all written before 100 CE\* (according to most conservative Christians) or 150 CE (according to most liberal Christians). (*The **Common Era (CE)**, sometimes known as the **Current Era**, is the period of measured time beginning with the year 1 (the traditional birthdate of Jesus) to the present. The notations CE and BCE (Before the Common Era) are alternative notations for AD (anno Domini, Latin for "in the year of the Lord") and BC (Before Christ). Although the term common era was first used by some Christians, it is now a term preferred by some as a religiously neutral alternative. Others criticize it as an unnecessary euphemism or an attempt at political correctness, pointing out that the pivotal year 1 still centers on the supposed date of Jesus' birth. It has its equivalents in other languages. For example, since the Communist People's Republic of China abolished the Republic of China era in 1949, the Chinese have used the literal translation of Common Era, gōngyuán, for date notation*)

The concept of homosexuality as a sexual orientation that could lead to a committed, long term relationship was not developed until the late 19th century. Thus, one can not expect to find biblical references to same-sex marriage. There are no references to planes, trains or automobiles, either.

It's also important to understand what the term "Marriage" meant in the biblical context. Marriage was not the same in terms of commitment or ceremony as it is today. The average person 2000 years ago did not have large and elaborate commitment "ceremonies" or "marriages" in front of their friends and neighbors and officiated by a man of the cloth as we do nowadays. Back then, if a woman was raped, she was married. If a woman was sold for 50 shekels, she was married. If the slave master gave a female slave to one of his male slaves for procreation in order to increase the slave master's number of slaves (a.k.a. wealth), they were married. When couple lived together, they were considered married.

One is left with many Biblical passages which condemn fornication - sex outside of marriage. If one were to accept these passages as inspired by God, then one can conclude that the Bible considers homosexual sex within a committed relationship as equivalent to a man and woman living together common-law without having being married.

### **The use of the word "Homosexual" in English translations of the Bible**

The word "homosexual" generally refers to sexual orientation. People have one of three orientations:

- Most are heterosexual: they are sexually attracted only to members of the opposite sex.
- A minority are homosexual: they are sexually attracted only to members of the same sex.
- A smaller minority are bisexual: they are attracted to both men and women, but not necessarily to the same degree.

The term dates from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, when human sexuality began to be studied as a science.

There is no term that means homosexual orientation in the original Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek texts of the Bible. The authors of the Bible did not understand sexual orientation and thus did not write about it. Biblical authors had little or no understanding of same-sex committed relationships. Rather, they assumed that everyone was heterosexual, but that some heterosexuals engaged in sex with

persons of the same gender. Thus, when you see one of these words in an English translation of the Bible, it is important to dig deeper and find what the original Hebrew or Greek text really means.

## **Society in Biblical Times:**

In Biblical times, same-gender sexual interactions could take many forms. Some were:

- Kings of conquered tribes were sometimes anally raped by the invading army as the ultimate symbol of defeat and humiliation. Homosexual rape was also a way of humiliating visitors and strangers. These were acts of power and domination and had nothing in common with consensual sex by gays and lesbians.
- Some religious groups both in and around ancient Israel had male prostitutes in their temples who ritually engaged in same-sex activities. These practices were frequently condemned in the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament). Temple prostitution is no longer found in most areas of the world.
- It was common within the Roman Empire for male adults to keep boy prostitutes for the purpose of sexual activity. The boys were often slaves. In modern times, this is considered extreme child abuse, a criminal offense.
- It is reasonable to assume that many loving gay and lesbian relationships existed in Biblical times. Rabbi Gershon Caudill wrote: *"Like all indigenous peoples, the Jews were not overly concerned about male homosexuality, where two men lived together in a monogamous, sexual relationship. As a rule, it did not get any notice. The Talmud does not record a single instance of a person being brought before the Sanhedrin on the charge of homosexual activity."* <sup>6</sup> It was only a millennium after the Torah was written that the Talmud makes its first reference to homosexuality as a perversion. This occurred during the time when the Hebrews were being influenced by Greek culture -- one which accepted homosexual behavior.

Only the last type would have any similarity to today's gay and lesbian consensual, committed, loving relationships.

There were other differences between the culture of the ancient Israelites and modern day society:

- There was a general belief that life on earth was all that there was. A person who led a good life would be rewarded by God with a long life and many children. A person could live on after death only through their children.
- Having no belief in an afterlife, men were put under tremendous pressure to marry and procreate. An example of this is seen in Genesis 38, where a widow was expected to have at least one child fathered by her former husband's brother in order to continue her husband's line. Thus both adult bachelorhood and being in a loving same-sex relationship would not have been the preferred situation



## How Religious Conservatives and Liberals interpret the Bible:

Conservative and liberal Christians interpret the Bible in very different ways. This leads to two distinct and contradictory sets of beliefs within Christianity on just about every conceivable topic. Homosexuality is no exception.

**Conservative Christian** theologians generally believe that

- The Bible was written by authors who were directly inspired by God. Thus their writings are seen as inerrant -- completely free of error as originally written.
- The Bible is regarded as the actual Word of God. Thus whenever the Bible and science disagree, the former must be right.
- Most interpret the Garden of Eden story in the book of Genesis as indicating the fall of humanity into sin. They view homosexual behavior as one evidence of that sin.
- When they study the Bible for guidance on homosexuality, they generally look for proof texts -- passages that directly deal with the topic.

**Liberal Christian** theologians tend to:

- Interpret the Bible as having been written by authors who were intent on promoting their own religious and spiritual beliefs. The writers lived in a pre-scientific age, which treated slavery, genocide, mass murder, and the oppression of women as acceptable.
- Since meaningful scientific study of sexual orientation did not begin until circa 1950 CE, biblical authors had no awareness of the topic. When the Bible and science disagree, we have to give greater weight to the recent findings of human sexuality researchers.
- Interpret the creation story in Genesis as composed of myths derived from Middle Eastern pagan religions. Many do not accept the reality of the fall of humanity.
- When liberal theologians study the Bible for guidance on homosexuality, they generally look for applicable biblical themes, like those advocating justice, love, monogamy, caring, commitment, etc.

## People's Beliefs Regarding the Bible:

People differ greatly in their view of the Bible: Generally speaking, Fundamentalists and other Evangelical Christians believe that:

- The Bible, as originally written, is inerrant (infallible; free of errors) and that God prevented the authors from making even a single mistake
- Every verse is useful in their understanding of God's intentions.
- One should interpret each passage according to its literal meaning.
- Many modern translations are reliable, particularly the New International Version (NIV) and King James Version (KJV).

Many conservative Christians trust the KJV and NIV. Thus, when they read some of the passages that clearly and unmistakably condemn homosexuality, they are inclined to trust the translators and

conclude that God hates homosexuality. Unfortunately, many groups of translators have been heavily biased against certain groups, including Witches, gays and lesbians; many have tended to warp their translations accordingly.

At this web site, we try to avoid criticizing the beliefs of religious groups. However, we feel free to criticize their religiously motivated activities if they exhibit hatred against an identifiable group or when they have a negative impact on the civil rights of others.

We have noticed a practice of a few Fundamentalist and other Evangelical Christian pastors which appear to be unethical and dishonest. We use the word "*appear*" because we are not certain that the pastors are consciously aware of their practices:

- Some pastors cite Genesis 19, a passage that condemns homosexual rape, as proof that God hates all homosexual behavior. Yet they would never quote a verse that condemns heterosexual rape and state that it applies to all heterosexual activity.
- We have noticed some pastors switching between Bible translations in order to find the version that is most critical of homosexual behavior. When quoting Deuteronomy 23:17 some deviate from their usual usage of the New International Version (NIV). It accurately translates the original Hebrew condemnation of male and female prostitution in the temple (a common Pagan practice). They prefer the King James Version (KJV) which incorrectly translates the passage as condemning female prostitutes and male "sodomites."

More liberal Christians tend to look upon the Bible as containing many translation errors, whose verses were not inspired by God, but were influenced by ancient pre-scientific culture. Passages often relate to customs of a long-past era that are unethical when compared to today's secular and religious systems of morality. Examples are verses which accept and regulate slavery, require widows to marry their brother-in-law, requiring victims of rape to marry their rapist, or condone child disciplinary practices which most parents have now abandoned. Passages which might be interpreted as condemning homosexuality might also be not applicable today.

Each Bible translation reflects the world view, beliefs and mind sets of its translators. Many, if not most, versions of the Bible are funded by religious organizations and employ translators who all follow a specific theological belief system. Their personal biases distort their work. There is an additional complexity facing translators: today's society is very different from that of Biblical times. It is sometimes difficult to find a current English word that closely matches a Hebrew or Greek term.

## **Are Bible Translators Truly Free of Bias?**

The answer is no. They have never been free to translate the Bible as their understanding of the original Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek dictated. One famous example was the translation of the *King James Version* of the Bible. The translators were pressured into attacking "witches" where:

- The original Hebrew text in the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament) discussed women who used spoken curses to hurt or kill others.
- The original Greek text in the Christian Scriptures (New Testament) discussed people who murdered others through the use of poison.



In modern times, the pressures are from economic considerations, not by royal commands.

Take Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, for example. A word-by-word analysis of these two verses by the *National Gay Pentecostal Alliance* (NGPA), showed that the passages do not prohibit all same-sex behavior; they do not even prohibit all male same-sex activities. They merely control where male-male intercourse is allowed. It cannot be performed in a woman's bed, because that location is sacrosanct. Only the woman, and under certain circumstances a man, may occupy it. Otherwise, a serious defilement would result. <sup>7</sup>

- The *New International Version* (NIV) currently translates Leviticus 18:22 as:  
*"Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman; that is detestable."*
- The New Living Translation (NLT) widens the translation to also include lesbians:  
*"Do not practice homosexuality; it is a detestable sin."*
- Imagine what would happen if the interpretation by the National Gay Pentecostal Alliance (NGPA) was used. Translators might render this verse as:  
*"Two men must not engage in sexual activity on a woman's bed; it is ritually unclean."*
- By reading various translations of the Bible, generations of Christians have been conditioned to expect this verse to condemn all homosexual behavior -- or at least all male same-sex activity. They expect that it will be morally condemned as *"an abomination"* or at least as a *"detestable"* act. But this new translation does not prohibit male to male sexual behavior; it only limits where the act can be performed. And it does not say that this conduct, if done on a woman's bed, is to be morally condemned. It only says that it is ritually unclean, like coming too close to a dead body, or eating shellfish, or getting a tattoo. The readers would assume that the translation is defective and that the translators were distorting the original meaning of the passage in order to be politically correct and not offend gays and lesbians. The readers would be disinclined to buy the Bible. Thus, a truly accurate Bible would be a financial failure, and would never see the light of day.

## Conservative and Liberal Views:

- Conservative Christian theologians tend to accept English translations of the Bible, such as the New International Version (NIV) and the King James Version (KJV) as authoritative. They generally accept the inerrancy of the Bible. They interpret passages literally, unless there is a good reason not to. They consider all Bible passages as instructive in today's society. When they see any same-sex activity condemned, they believe that this applies to all homosexual activities. All homosexual behavior is sinful, regardless of the nature of the relationship. Homosexuality is a chosen, unnatural, abnormal, changeable, and perverted lifestyle, which is hated by God.
- Liberal Christian theologians tend to follow a wider variety of translations, and to be more concerned with instances of copying errors in the original Hebrew or Greek, of forgery, and of biases among the translators. They consider some passages (e.g. those referring to slavery, burning some hookers alive, raping female prisoners of war, etc.) as not being valid today, as immoral, and against the will of God. They differentiate among various homosexual and heterosexual sex practices, treating some (rape, prostitution, temple sex rituals) as immoral and some (within committed relationships) as positive. Homosexual orientation and behavior is seen as a normal human sexual expression among a minority of adults. It is not changeable

or chosen. Like all sexual behavior, it can be a sin if it is exploitive or manipulative or not carried out safely within a committed relationship.

## Ruth and Naomi

Ruth 1:16-17 and 2:10-11 describe their close friendship. Perhaps the best known passage from this book is Ruth 1:16-17 which is often read out during opposite-sex and same-sex marriage and union ceremonies:

*"Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death separates you and me." (NIV)*

Ruth 1:14, referring to the relationship between Ruth and Naomi, mentions that "Ruth **clave** onto her." (KJV) The Hebrew word translated here as "**clave**" is identical to that used in the description of a heterosexual marriage in Genesis 2:24: "*Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall **cleave** unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.*" (KJV)

This book was probably included in the Hebrew Scriptures because King David was one of the descendents of Ruth.

## David and Jonathan

Passages in 1 Samuel & 2 Samuel describe, among other events, an extremely close bond between David and Jonathan. Jonathan was the son of King Saul, and next in line for the throne. But Samuel anointed David to be the next king. This produced a strong conflict in the mind of Saul.

### Interpretation:

- Religious conservatives generally view the friendship of David and Jonathan as totally non-sexual. They find it inconceivable that God would allow a famous king of Israel to be a homosexual.
- Some religious liberals believe that David and Jonathan had a consensual homosexual relationship - in many ways, a prototype of many of today's gay partnerships. 8 Some important verses which describe their relationship are:

### 1 Samuel 18:1

- "...Jonathan became one in spirit with David and he loved him as himself." (NIV)
- "...the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul" (KJV)
- Most translations use the term "**soul**" rather than "*spirit*" to describe the bond. They speak of an "*immediate bond of love*", their souls being "*in unison*," their souls being "*knit*", etc. Genesis 2:7, as written in the original Hebrew, describes how God blew the spirit into the body of Adam that God had formed from earth, so that Adam became a living soul. This means that "**soul**", in the ancient Israelite times, represents a

combination of body and spirit. Thus the two men appear to have loved each other both physically and emotionally.

### 1 Samuel 18:2

- *"From that day, Saul kept David with him and did not let him return to his father's house." (NIV)*
- David left his parent's home and moved to Saul's where he would be with Jonathan. This is a strong indication that the relationship was extremely close. It echoes the passage marriage passage in Genesis 2:24: *"Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh."*

### 1 Samuel 18:3-4

- *"And Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as himself. Jonathan took off the robe he was wearing and gave it to David, along with his tunic, and even his sword, his bow and his belt." (NIV)*
- Since people in those days did not wear underwear, Jonathan stripped himself naked in front of David. That would be considered extremely unusual behavior (then and now) unless their relationship was physical.

### 1 Samuel 18:20-21

- *"Now Saul's daughter Michal was in love with David, and when they told Saul about it, he was pleased. 'I will give her to him', he thought, 'so that she may be a snare to him and so that the hand of the Philistines may be against him'. Now you have a second opportunity to become my son-in-law" (NIV)*
- In the King James Version, the end of Verse 21 reads:
- *"Thou shalt this day be my son-in-law, in the one of the twain." (KJV)*
- Saul's belief was that David would be so distracted by a wife that he would not be an effective fighter and would be killed by the Philistines. He offered first his daughter Merab, but that was rejected, presumably by her. Then he offered Michal. There is an interesting phrase used at the end of verse 21. In both the NIV and KJV, it would seem that David's first opportunity to be a son-in-law was with the older daughter Merab, and his second was with the younger daughter Michal. The KJV preserves the original text in its clearest form; it implies that David would become Saul's son-in-law through "one of the twain." "Twain" means "two", so the verse seems to refer to one of Saul's two daughters. Unfortunately, this is a mistranslation. The underlined phrase "the one of" does not exist in the Hebrew original. The words are shown in italics in the King James Version; this is an admission by the translators that they made the words up. Thus, if the KJV translators had been truly honest, they would have written:
- *"Thou shalt this day be my son-in-law, in the twain."*
- In modern English, this might be written: *"Today, you are son-in-law with two of my children."* That would refer to both his son Jonathan and his daughter Michal. The Hebrew original would appear to recognize David and Jonathan's homosexual relationship as equivalent to David and Michal's heterosexual marriage. Saul may have

approved or disapproved of the same-sex relationship; but at least he appears to have recognized it. The KJV highlight their re-writing of the Hebrew original by placing the three words in italics; the NIV translation is clearly deceptive.

## 1 Samuel 20:41

- *"After the boy had gone, David got up from the south side of the stone and bowed down before Jonathan three times, with is face to the ground. Then they kissed each other and wept together - but David wept the most."* (NIV)
- Other translations have a different ending to the verse:
- *"...and they kissed one another and wept with one another, until David exceeded."* (KJV)
- *"...and they kissed one another and wept with one another until David got control of himself."* (Amplified Bible)
- *"and they sadly shook hands, tears running down their cheeks until David could weep no more."* (Living Bible)
- *"They kissed each other and wept together until David got control of himself."* (Modern Language)
- *"They kissed each other and wept aloud together."* (New American Bible)
- *"Then David and Jonathan kissed each other. They cried together, but David cried the most."* (New Century Version)
- *"Then they kissed one another and shed tears together, until David's grief was even greater than Jonathan's."* (Revised English Bible)
- *"...and they kissed one another and wept with one another until David recovered himself."* (Revised Standard Version)
- The translators of the Living Bible apparently could not handle the thought of two adult men kissing, so they mistranslated the passage by saying that the two men shook hands! This is somewhat less than honest. The original Hebrew text says that *"they kissed each other and wept together until David became great."* The word which means "great" in this passage is *"gada"* in the original Hebrew. The same word is used elsewhere in the Hebrew Scriptures to refer to King Solomon being greater than all other kings. Some theologians interpret *"gada"* in this verse as indicating that David had an erection. However, the thoughts of David becoming sexually aroused after kissing Jonathan may have been too threatening for Bible translators. They either deleted the ending entirely or created one of their own.

## 2 Samuel 1:26

- *"I grieve for you, Jonathan my brother; you were very dear to me. Your love for me was wonderful, more wonderful than that of women."*
- In the society of ancient Israel, it was not considered proper for a man and woman to have a platonic relationship. Men and women rarely spoke to each other in public. Since David's only relationships with women would have been sexual in nature, then he must be referring to sexual love here. It would not make sense in this verse to compare platonic love for a man with sexual love for a woman; they are two completely different phenomenon. It would appear that David is referring to his sexual love for Jonathan

## Daniel and Ashpenaz

Daniel 1:9 refers to Ashpenaz, the chief of the court officials of Nebuchadnezzar, the King of Babylon.

### Various English translations differ greatly:

- *"Now God had caused the official to show favor and sympathy to Daniel" (NIV)*
- *"Now God had brought Daniel into favor and tender love with the prince of the eunuchs" (KJV)*
- *"Now God made Daniel to find favor, compassion and loving-kindness with the chief of the eunuchs" (Amplified Bible)*
- *"Now, as it happens, God had given the superintendent a special appreciation for Daniel and sympathy for his predicament" (Living Bible)*
- *"Then God granted Daniel favor and sympathy from the chief of the eunuchs" (Modern Language)*
- *"Though God had given Daniel the favor and sympathy of the chief chamberlain..." (New American Bible)*
- *"God made Ashpenaz want to be kind and merciful to Daniel" (New Century Version)*
- *"And God gave Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the chief of the eunuchs" (Revised Standard Version)*
- *"God caused the master to look on Daniel with kindness and goodwill" (Revised English Version)*

### Interpretation:

- Religious conservatives generally view the friendship of Daniel and Ashpenaz as totally non-sexual. According to them, it is inconceivable that God would allow a famous prophet of Israel to be a homosexual.
- Some religious liberals detect the possibility of a homosexual relationship here. The Hebrew words which describe the relationship between Daniel and Ashpenaz are **chesed v'rachamim**. The most common translation of **chesed** is "mercy". **V'rachamim** is in a plural form which is used to emphasize its relative importance. It has multiple meanings: "mercy" and "physical love". It is unreasonable that the original Hebrew would read that Ashpenaz *"showed mercy and mercy."* A more reasonable translation would thus be that Ashpenaz *showed mercy and engaged in physical love* with Daniel. Of course, this would be unacceptable to later translators, so they substitute more innocuous terms. The KJV reference to "tender love" would appear to be the closest to the truth. One might question whether Daniel and Ashpenaz could sexually consummate their relationship. They were both eunuchs. Apparently, when males are castrated after puberty, they still retain sexual drive. It is interesting to note that no other romantic interest or sexual partner of Daniel was mentioned elsewhere in the Bible. We must remember that sexual orientation isn't strictly about sex – it's also emotionally who one is attracted to. If eunuchs can't physically have sex – can they still be emotionally attracted to one another, can they have a loving feeling and bond.

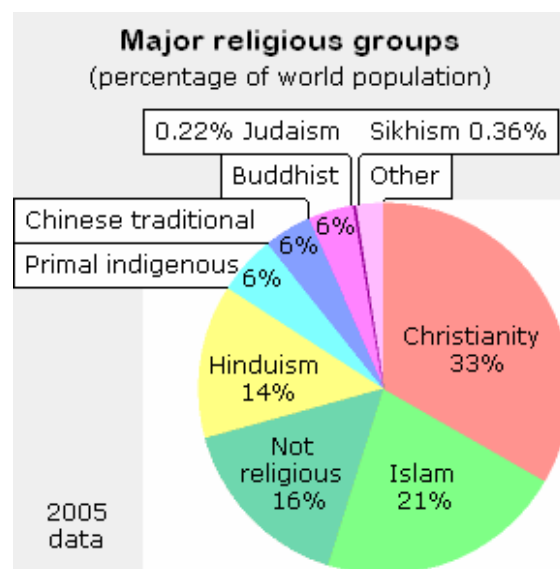
## Size of Religious Groups in the U.S.

Polling data from early 2001 indicate that:

- 76.5% (159 million) of Americans identify themselves as Christian. This is a major slide from 86.2% in 1990. Identification with Christianity has suffered a loss of 9.7 percentage points in 11 years -- about 0.9 percentage points per year. (See the list below which includes all the denominations of "Christians")
- 52% of the 159 Million Americans identified themselves as Protestant.
- 24.5% are Roman Catholic.
- 14.1% do not follow any organized religion. This is an unusually rapid increase from only 8% in 1990.
- 1.3% are Jewish.
- 0.5% are Muslim, followers of Islam.
- The fastest growing religion (in terms of percentage) is Wicca. It went from 8,000 in 1990 to 134,000 in 2001. Their numbers of adherents are doubling about every 30 months. 9

The percentage of Americans who are Protestants are expected to dip below 50% sometime before the end of 2006.

**Into modern times:** Protestant Christianity became fractured into over 1,500 individual denominations, as individuals and groups began to interpret the Bible in their own unique ways. They continually formed new sects that they felt were closer to Jesus' intentions for the church. In the past fifteen decades in North America schisms occurred over the legitimacy of human slavery, and whether to allow women to be ordained. A number of mainline denominations -- Presbyterian, Methodist, Episcopal -- are attempting to keep their organizations intact in spite of differences of belief about sexual orientation. They are debating whether to grant equal rights to gays and lesbians, and whether to recognize same-sex relationships.





## All Religions or Belief Systems by Number of Adherents

This listing distinguishes between organized religion, which has a single belief code and religious hierarchies, and informal religions, such as Chinese folk religions.

1. Christianity 2.1 billion (Began: ca. 27 AD/CE)
  - Roman Catholicism: 1.085 billion
  - Protestantism (including Anglicanism): 674 million (Began: ca. 1520)
  - Eastern Orthodoxy: 200 million
  - Oriental Orthodoxy, Assyrians, and other Christians: 350 million
  - Latter Day Saints (Mormons) 12.6 million (Began: ca. 1830)
2. Islam 1.3 billion (Began: ca. 622 AD/CE)
  - Sunnism: 940 million
  - Shi'ism: 170 million
  - Sufi, Ibadiyyah, Druze and other Muslims : 80 million
3. Secular/irreligious/agnostic/atheist/antitheistic/antireligious 1.1 billion
  - Category includes a wide range of beliefs, without specifically adhering to a religion. The category also includes humanism, deism, pantheism, and free thought. For more information, see the Adherents.com discussion of this category.
4. Hinduism 900 million (Began: approximately 1500 BC/BCE)
  - Vaishnavism: 580 million
  - Shaivism: 220 million
  - Shaktism/Smartism/Arya Samaj/Other sects: 150 million
5. Buddhism 708 million (Began: 6th century BC/BCE)
  - Mahayana: 185 million
  - Theravada: 124 million
  - Vajrayana: unknown
6. Primal indigenous 300 million
  - Not a single organized religion, includes a wide range of primarily Asian traditional or tribal religions, including Shamanism and Paganism.
7. African traditional and diasporic 100 million
  - Not a single organized religion, this includes traditional African beliefs such as Yoruba as well as diasporic beliefs such as Santeria (which itself draws from Catholicism) and Vodoun.
8. Shintoism 69 million (Began: 300 BC/BCE)
  - This number states the number of practicing followers of Shintoism; for if partial or ethnic followers of Shintoism were included, the number would fall around 100–115 million.
9. Sikhism 23 million (Began: 1500s)
10. Juche 19 million
  - Not considered a religion by adherents, who view it as secular and anti-revisionist. Juche is the political ideology of the Workers Party of Korea, the ruling party of the DPRK; some have argued it constitutes a religion due to its Great Leader Worship characteristics. The number is approximately the entire population of the country.
11. Spiritism 15 million (Began: mid-19th century)

- Not a single organized religion, includes a variety of beliefs including some forms of Umbanda.
- 12. Judaism 15 million (Began: 13th century BC/BCE)
- 13. Falun Gong 10-100 million\* (Began: 1992)
  - Not necessarily considered a religion by adherents or outside observers. No membership or rosters, thus the actual figure of practitioners is impossible to confirm.
- 14. Bahá'í Faith 7 million (Began: 19th century)
- 15. Jainism 4.2 million (Began: 6th century BC/BCE)
- 16. Cao Dai 4 million (Began: 1926)
- 17. Humanism\*\* over 3 million
- 18. Zoroastrianism 2.6 million (Began: ca. 6th century BC/BCE)
- 19. Tenrikyo 2 million (Began: 1838)
- 20. Neopaganism 1 million (Began: 20th century)
  - A blanket term for several religions like Wicca, Asatru, Druidry, and many reconstructionist religions
- 21. Unitarian Universalism 800,000 (Began: 1961)
- 22. Rasta 600,000 (Began: early 1930s)

Source of statistics for all religions but Falun Gong and Humanism: adherents.com, updated 2005. These statistics are based on analysis of a range of sources on religious populations, for more on the methodology, please see Adherent.com's explanation.

\*Falun Gong estimate that of the People's Republic of China, other estimates are much higher.

\*\*[1] [2] Estimates from American Humanist Association, and Indian Humanist Union

## Organized Religions by Population Ranking

The Christian Science Monitor used a separate standard, examining only organized religions. The newspaper listed the following in 1998 as the "Top 10 Organized Religions in the World" based on descending level of population:

1. Christianity
2. Islam
3. Hinduism
4. Buddhism
5. Sikhism
6. Judaism
7. Bahá'í Faith
8. Confucianism
9. Jainism
10. Shintoism

This list has taken Hinduism as a single religion even though technically it is an amalgam of various schools of thought and cultures that are found in the Indian subcontinent and elsewhere

## Homosexuality and Religion

The relationship between homosexuality and religion varies greatly across time and place, between different religions and sects and different forms of homosexuality and bisexuality. Some religions view same-sex love and sexuality as sacred, including some Ancient Greek religions and other pre-Christian faiths in Europe, some tantric groups and some shamanistic religions that have survived the spread of organized religion. A mythology of same-sex love can be found around the world, such as among the Hindu pantheon of deities.

Other religions such as Judaism, Islam, and Christianity traditionally forbid sexual relations between people of the same sex and teach that such behaviour is sinful. Religious authorities point to passages in the Qur'an (7:80-81, 26:165), the Hebrew Bible (Leviticus 18:22) and the New Testament (Romans 1:26-27, I Timothy 1:9-10) for scriptural justification for these beliefs.

Currently, positions among the major organized religions vary. At one end of the spectrum some liberal denominations (**Unitarian Universalism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Confucianism and Sikhism, Taoism, and Greco-Roman religion** for example) now support same-sex relations and facilitate same-sex marriages. In opposition to this, most mainstream Christian denominations adhere to the traditional view, including the largest denomination, Catholicism. Many prominent modern American Christian preachers (including Fred Phelps, Pat Robertson, Robert Grant and Jerry Falwell) are noted for their vocal opposition to homosexuality. There are also religious denominations (notably Islamic groups in Central Asia, the Middle East and Africa) that advocate execution of gay men and women for violating their denomination's creed. Homosexuality is a capital crime in Iran, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Yemen, Sudan, and Mauritania. Other religious groups, however, regard them as a positive grace from God. Within many religions there is intense debate over translations and interpretations within sacred texts regarding homosexuality.

## Common Conclusions by Fundamentalist Christians:

Fundamentalist Christians represent the conservative wing of Evangelical Christianity, which in turn represents the conservative Wing of Christianity. They typically believe in the strict [inerrancy](#) of the Bible and in historical Protestant beliefs. They interpret most biblical passages literally. They view the Bible as the Word of God fully applicable to present day situations. Many believe:

- **Whether a sexual act is a sin or not is largely defined by the act itself.** e.g. **all** homosexual activity is inherently sinful, irrespective of the relationship between the two persons. Most heterosexual activity is not sinful if it is done within a marriage.
- Many biblical passages condemn **all** forms of homosexual behaviors, using inclusive terms such as "*sodomite*" or "*homosexual*."
- God destroyed Sodom and its inhabitants because of their homosexual activity. All the men in the town wanted to have homosexual sex with the visiting angels.
- There are no committed, consensual homosexual relationships described in the Bible.
- The Bible refers to homosexual acts; it does not talk about sexual orientation. If such a thing as an unchangeable sexual orientation exists, it would have been mentioned in the Bible.
- Same-sex practices are uniquely offensive to God. After all, the only time that God destroyed a city was Sodom because of male citizens' homosexual sin. Homosexual behavior is one of a

small group of behaviors that will prevent a person from attaining salvation and going to heaven. *1 Corinthians 6:9-10* says that "...neither...effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind...shall inherit the kingdom of God." Other English translators substitute the term "homosexuals" here.

- Some Fundamentalists interpret *1 Corinthians 6:11*, as stating that if gays and lesbians are truly saved, God will remove their homosexual feelings and convert them to a heterosexual orientation. Thus, no individuals who continue to engage in homosexual activities have actually been saved; all are destined for Hell after death. Others believe that gays and lesbians can change their sexual orientation through reparative counseling and prayer.
- Some Fundamentalist Christian organizations have invested heavily in media advertisements which emphasize that gays and lesbians can become ex-gays and leave the "*homosexual lifestyle*."

### Common Conclusions by Mainline Christians:

When North America is faced with a major ethical conflict, it tends to be resolved first among religious liberals, and last among religious conservatives. This has been the pattern in such conflicts as equal rights for women, including the right to vote; an end to racial segregation; and legalization of interracial marriage. Currently active topics like abortion access, physician assisted suicide, and equal rights for gays and lesbians appear to be in the process of being resolved in the same way.

The "*gay agenda*" which includes:

- protection from hate crimes based on sexual orientation;
- an end to discrimination in employment and accommodation;
- the right to marry or enter into civil unions;
- the right to be accepted as church members;
- the right to be considered for ordination, etc.

is no exception. Most conservative Christians are firmly in favor of maintaining the status quo; many liberal Christians feel that ethical considerations require equal rights for homosexuals both within and outside of the church.

A serious problem facing most mainline denominations is that the conservative/liberal split is reflected in the membership of their own congregations. Within each mainline faith group, there is a wide range of belief on all social and theological topics, from abortion access to the virgin birth. The larger mainline denominations have spawned internal, conservative, reform movements which are attempting to restore church teaching, belief and practices to those of earlier times. They seek to prevent sexually active gays and lesbians from being considered for ordination, and to prevent the church from holding homosexual union or commitment ceremonies for gay and lesbian couples. Meanwhile, liberals within these same denominations -- often including central leadership in the denomination -- are fighting for change. Bitterly fought battles have occurred in such denominations as the *Episcopal Church*, *Presbyterian Church (USA)*, and *United Methodist Church*. The possibility of denominational schism has been raised, as they were over previous ethical clashes such as the legality of slavery and women's ordination.

- The *Episcopal Church* might be evolving in the direction of a schism. There are, in effect, two Episcopal Churches within the United States. Two bishops head a conservative, reform Episcopal movement which is attempting to end female ordination and roll back gains made by gays and lesbians within the church.
- The *Presbyterian Church (USA)* may be moving towards a liberal point of view. At a 2000-Fall meeting of the *Covenant Network of Presbyterians*, (a conservative reform group), speakers stated that "*Scriptural condemnations of homosexuality merely reflect biblical authors' cultural biases and are not among the 'essential' messages of the gospel.*" Several conference speakers said the Bible's condemnations of same-gender sexuality call to mind other scriptural passages used in past centuries to justify slavery and to keep women from participating fully in the life of the church -- on the basis of long-held interpretations that are largely abandoned today." <sup>12</sup> Speaker William Placher from Wabash College, said interpreters of the Bible must "draw a line between cultural conventions and the truths that Bible stories convey," and always "keep in mind the assumptions the author brought to his time and place." He said the apostle Paul, for example, lived in a patriarchal culture where it was "socially acceptable to treat homosexuals with contempt." <sup>12</sup>
- *United Methodist Church*: The conservative wing of this denomination appears to be currently gaining ground. At their 2000-MAY convention, a resolution was proposed about homosexuality. It read "*Many consider this practice incompatible with Christian teaching. Others believe it acceptable when practiced in a context of human covenantal faithfulness.*" This motion was simply a statement of fact. It accurately reflected the reality of the division within the denomination. However, it was voted down by a ratio of 1.5 to 1.

For the foreseeable future, mainline denominations will undoubtedly remain split over the homosexual issue, with one part of their membership following conservative Christian beliefs (described above) and the rest following liberal beliefs (described below). Only time will tell whether the conflict will be resolved through:

- a compromise (as in a local option plan which would let individual congregations or regions decide what path to take), or
- a gradual fading of the conflict as one division within the church loses support, or
- church schism.

One or more denominational schisms may well materialize as they did over slavery. However, history has shown that they need not be permanent.

## **Common Conclusions by Liberal Christians:**

Religious liberals generally do not view the Bible as inerrant. They see it as a collection of writings by various authors, each of whom was promoting their own religious beliefs. Thus, biblical passages describe how Jewish and early Christian societies viewed various matters. They may or may not reflect the will of God. Passages relating to the genocide of whole peoples, the oppression of women and slavery are certainly not in accordance with the wishes of God.

Some religious liberals argue one or more of the following points:



- English versions of the Bible are translations from the original Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek texts. The wording has been filtered through the mind-set and prejudices of various sets of translators. They feel that one must carefully examine the original texts from the point of view of ancient Israeli and early Christian societies in order to determine their precise meaning.
- **Most religious liberals believe that some sexual acts are sinful; others are not. It depends mainly on the participants' relationship, not by the specific act itself.** They view manipulative, dominating, coercive, under age and/or unsafe sex as sinful. Safe heterosexual or homosexual sex within a truly consenting and committed relationship is not sinful. Author Chris Levan sees this reflected in the Bible. He writes: *"The best response that scripture can give with regard to homosexuality is the declaration that our Creator is very often not concerned about the 'who' of relationship so much as the 'how.' It simply asks if the relationship is functioning according to principles of justice and dignity? Does the partnership demonstrate mutual trust and compassion? If so, it is blessed by God."*<sup>10</sup>
- The original passages in the Hebrew Scriptures usually do not refer to homosexual acts in general, but to specific immoral behaviors, such as rape, ritual sex in Pagan temples, and prostitution:
  - **Genesis 19:** Other biblical passages about Sodom identify the sin of the city as being unresponsive to the poor and needy, and being uncharitable towards strangers. The only obvious sexual sin of Sodom was a desire to rape strangers.
  - **Leviticus 18 & 20:** Male ritual sexual activity in Pagan temples is clearly prohibited. Such behavior was a common practice within the Canaanite fertility religion. The practice was also taken up by some ancient Israelites.
  - **Deuteronomy 23:** Prostitution, both heterosexual and homosexual is always condemned.
  - **Judges 19:** A duplicate of the Genesis story.
- Jimmy Creech, former senior pastor of the *First United Methodist Church*, in Omaha, Nebraska has concluded that: *"...there was no understanding of sexual orientation in the culture and time when scripture was written. There was not even a word for 'homosexuality' or 'homosexual' in Hebrew, Greek and Aramaic, the original languages of scripture. There are biblical references that condemn same-sex sexual behavior, but they are all within contexts related to violence, idolatry, promiscuity and exploitation. Careful reading within the historical setting reveals that it is the violence, idolatry, promiscuity and exploitation that is condemned, not the same-sex sexual behavior. The same condemnation is given to opposite-sex sexual behavior that is violent, idolatrous, promiscuous and exploitative."*<sup>3</sup>
- The Bible says little about homosexual feelings.
- The Bible says nothing about the concept of sexual orientation for the same reason as it does not mention television sets and airplanes. All were unknown in biblical times. The concept of orientation dates only from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and only began to be seriously investigated in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.
- There may be as many as three references in the Bible to committed homosexual relationships, none of which was condemned.
- Paul's Epistles in the Christian Scriptures considered at least some male and female homosexual acts to be forbidden, but it is unclear precisely which acts are included. He may have been referring to:
  - temple prostitution,
  - ritual sex activities in Pagan temples,
  - heterosexuals who engaged in homosexual acts against their basic nature,



- child sexual abuse,
- group sexual orgies, or
- all people who commit any homosexual acts.

Paul was certainly aware of sexual orgies in Pagan temples, including both heterosexual and homosexual encounters. He would have been aware of the practice of male adults keeping a boy (often a slave) for sexual purposes. These may have been the only forms of same-gender sex that he knew of. He did not appear to make any references in his writings to consensual, committed homosexual relationships. He may well have not known of any; he may not have known that any could exist.

- Paul is not necessarily a useful guide for ethics and morals. Elsewhere in his writing, he was sexist: For example, he condemned women preaching (*1 Corinthians 14:34*). A passage in *1 Timothy 2:11* condemned the wearing gold or pearls. This book says that it was written by Paul, but most mainline and liberal theologians believe that it was written up to 80 years after Paul's death. Paul accepted and did not criticize the institution of slavery (*Philemon 1:15 to 16*). Many Christians feel that some of his writings reflect his own prejudices are not a particularly helpful guide today.
- **Of the many hundreds of Jesus' instructions and prohibitions recorded in the gospels, few if any have a sexual component and none deal with homosexuality.**
- It is debatable whether St. Paul's prohibition of at least some homosexual acts was:
  - for the people in the vicinity of the Mediterranean during the 1st Century CE, or
  - for all people, forever.

One can argue that the ancient Israelites were surrounded by warlike tribes. Their fertility was very important if the group was to survive. The early Christian church was persecuted by the Roman government and by the Jewish religious leaders. Homosexuals tend to have few children; thus their presence would be met with opposition. At the end of the 20th Century, conditions are the exact opposite; we are threatened by our excessive fertility. Perhaps Paul's criticism of homosexuality (if that was his intent) is no longer valid today.

- Bible translators must be aware of the errors that have been made in previous versions of the Bible; they are widely discussed in theological literature. But it would probably not be economically possible at this time to produce a translation of the Bible that was accurate. People are so used to expecting homophobic references in a half-dozen locations in scripture that they probably would not buy a Bible that was accurate to the original text, or which admitted that the meanings of certain words are unknown.
- Most religious liberals agree with the main mental health associations. Sexual orientation is determined before school age, and is perhaps determined genetically at conception. It cannot be changed through prayer, religious conversion, reparative therapy, aversion therapy or counseling, any more than a person can change their race or gender.\*

[Note: Transgender individuals can and do have their appearance changed to that of the opposite gender through surgery, medication, makeup, etc. We are defining "*gender*" here in a narrow sense to refer to the X and Y chromosome content of each cell of a person's body. They are unchangeable.]

## Evangelical Christians (other than Fundamentalists):

Evangelical Christianity is a broad tent and contains a range of diverse beliefs. Most regard Fundamentalism as representing the conservative wing of Evangelical Christianity, which in turn represents the conservative wing of Christianity. Unfortunately, there are no generally accepted, precise definitions for the terms "*Fundamentalist*," and "*Evangelical*," or "*conservative Christian*." Thus, this section will necessarily remain vague.

Evangelicals, exclusive of the Fundamentalist wing, typically believe in the inerrancy of the Bible, but with a number of qualifications. They believe in historical Protestant beliefs, but have modified some of them. For example,

- Many reject the historical view of Hell as a place of never-ending physical torture; they now view Hell as a place of separation from God.
- Some have abandoned the historical view that all individuals who are unsaved during their lifetime will go to Hell. They feel that sending persons to Hell who have not had a chance to hear and accept the Gospel is profoundly immoral. It is an act that God is incapable of doing. They feel that God has provided some mechanism by which people who have not heard the Gospel can still be saved after their death, and attain Heaven.

On homosexuality, many non-Fundamentalist Evangelicals have beliefs that are slightly more liberal than those of Fundamentalists. They believe that:

- All homosexual activity is inherently sinful, whether it is done by singles or by gays or lesbians involved in committed relationships.
- Homosexual behavior is unacceptable. A Barna Research poll conducted in 2001-AUG showed that only 2% of Evangelical Christians (including Fundamentalists) regarded homosexuality as "*an acceptable lifestyle*." (In contrast, the general American population is evenly split on this matter.) The poll question is deeply flawed, because it can be interpreted in many ways. But it does indicate the degree of opposition to the acceptance of homosexuality as normal and natural for a minority of adults.
- Many biblical passages condemn all forms of homosexual behaviors, using inclusive terms such as "*sodomite*" or "*homosexual*."
- Some refer to the many references to Sodom in the Bible as implying that the inhabitants of Sodom were destroyed by God for their many sinful behaviors, only one of which was their homosexual activity.
- There are no committed, consensual homosexual relationships described in the Bible.
- Many recognize that sexual orientations do exist and are either fixed or nearly unchangeable for adults. Some even believe that people can be "*born gay*." Some agree with human sexuality researchers that three sexual orientations exist -- heterosexual, homosexual, and bisexual.
- Same-sex practices are offensive to God, but not uniquely so. Homosexual behavior is one of many sinful behaviors, like assault, theft, murder, etc.
- Some Fundamentalists interpret *1 Corinthians 6:11*, as implying that if gays and lesbians are truly saved, God will help them change their behavior and remain celibate.

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## Speaking of Faith...What Religion did our Forefathers Practice?

In a sermon of October 1831, Episcopalian minister **Bird Wilson** said,

“Among all of our Presidents, from Washington downward, not one was a professor of religion, at least not of more than Unitarianism.”

### **The Bible? Here is what our Founding Fathers wrote about Bible-based Christianity:**

**Thomas Jefferson:** “I have examined all the known superstitions of the world, and I do not find in our particular superstition of Christianity one redeeming feature. They are all alike founded on fables and mythology. Millions of innocent men, women and children, since the introduction of Christianity, have been burnt, tortured, fined and imprisoned. What has been the effect of this coercion? To make one half the world fools and the other half hypocrites; to support roguery and error all over the earth.”

**Jefferson again:** “Christianity (has become) the most perverted system that ever shone on man. ...Rogueries, absurdities and untruths were perpetrated upon the teachings of Jesus by a large band of dupes and importers led by Paul, the first great corrupter of the teaching of Jesus.”

**More Jefferson:** “The clergy converted the simple teachings of Jesus into an engine for enslaving mankind and adulterated by artificial constructions into a contrivance to filch wealth and power to themselves...these clergy, in fact, constitute the real Anti-Christ.”

**John Adams:** “Where do we find a precept in the Bible for Creeds, Confessions, Doctrines and Oaths, and whole carloads of other trumpery that we find religion encumbered with in these days?”

**Also Adams:** “The doctrine of the divinity of Jesus is made a convenient cover for absurdity.”

### **Adams signed the Treaty of Tripoli, Article 11 which states:**

“The government of the United States is in no sense founded on the Christian religion”, by George Washington

**Here's Thomas Paine:** A”mong the most detestable villains in history, you could not find one worse than Moses. Here is an order, attributed to 'God' to butcher the boys, to massacre the mothers and to debauch and rape the daughters. I would not dare so dishonor my Creator's name by (attaching) it to this filthy book (the Bible). It is the duty of every true Deist to vindicate the moral justice of God against the evils of the Bible. Accustom a people to believe that priests and clergy can forgive sins...and you will have sins in abundance. The Christian church has set up a religion of pomp and revenue in pretended imitation of a person (Jesus) who lived a life of poverty.”

Finally let's hear from **James Madison:** “What influence in fact have Christian ecclesiastical establishments had on civil society? In many instances they have been upholding the thrones of political tyranny. In no instance have they been seen as the guardians of the liberties of the people. Rulers who wished to subvert the public liberty have found in the clergy convenient auxiliaries. A just government, instituted to secure and perpetuate liberty, does not need the clergy.”

**Madison** objected to state-supported chaplains in Congress and to the exemption of churches from taxation. He wrote: "Religion and government will both exist in greater purity, the less they are mixed together."

These founding fathers were a reflection of the American population. Having escaped from the state-established religions of Europe, only 7% of the people in the 13 colonies belonged to a church when the Declaration of Independence was signed.

## Beliefs about Homosexuality; Studies of Sexual Orientation

### Quotations:

*"There could be hundreds of millions of straight men walking around with this gay allele [variety of a gene] but who are straight simply because it didn't penetrate"* Chandler Burr, *"A Separate Creation"* <sup>10</sup>

*"There is no scientific data that substantiates a genetic or biologic basis for same-sex attraction. Anybody can change."* Richard Cohen, at the year 2000 PFOX convention, 2000-MAY-19. <sup>11</sup>

### Different Belief Systems

We have identified six different belief systems about homosexuality. Of these, the two most extreme belief systems are explained below. It is important to realize that many -- perhaps most -- North Americans hold beliefs that are intermediate between these two viewpoints. There is a strong variation of belief with age. Many youth and young adults follow the liberal view; most middle aged and elderly persons hold strongly conservative views:

<b>HOMOSEXUALITY</b>	<b>The most conservative view,</b> typically promoted by the conservative religious groups, Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh, etc.	<b>The most liberal view,</b> Typically followed by religious liberals, gays, lesbians, mental health professionals and human services providers.
What it is	Something that one does; a chosen lifestyle.	Something that one is; an un-chosen orientation.
What causes it?	Multiple causes including: poor parenting, sexual molestation during childhood, perhaps demon possession. Addiction traps them in the lifestyle.	Genetically predetermined plus some unknown environmental factor in early childhood which "turns on" the gene or genes.
At what age does it become obvious in an individual?	Teenage years, after puberty, when it is chosen.	Homosexual orientation has been detected in pre-school children.
Is it sinful?	Yes. It is more serious than many other sins. It endangers the family and thus social stability.	Neither heterosexuality or homosexuality are inherently sinful. It is free of sin if it is safe, consensual and, perhaps, within a committed relationship.
Is it natural and normal?	It is an unnatural, abnormal deviant behavior.	It is normal and natural, for a minority of humans.
What should a homosexual do?	Choose to remain celibate, or attempt	Choose either celibacy or monogamy

<b>HOMOSEXUALITY</b>	<b>The most conservative view,</b> typically promoted by the conservative religious groups, Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh, etc.	<b>The most liberal view,</b> Typically followed by religious liberals, gays, lesbians, mental health professionals and human services providers.
	to change their orientation to heterosexual.	with a same-sex partner. Changing sexual orientation is not possible in all, or essentially all, cases.
God's attitude towards the homosexual and towards homosexuality	He loves the sinner, but hates homosexuality, which is always sinful.	Loves the person. Various beliefs: May approve of the activity if it is based on love and commitment. May approve if it is safe and consensual.
Is it changeable?	Yes, through counseling and prayer. But it requires effort because it is so addictive.	No. Sexual orientation is always or almost always fixed.
Is reparative therapy effective?	Yes; it is an effective method to changing homosexuals into heterosexuals.	It is a useless, ineffective, and potentially dangerous therapy that can trigger suicide.
Are anti-discrimination laws beneficial?	No. It would grant them special privileges, and encourage more youth to choose homosexuality.	Yes. They are a heavily discriminated-against minority in need of protection.
What happens to children raised by gays or lesbian parents?	A large percentage will become homosexuals. Those who don't will be disturbed by the presence of homosexuality in the home.	The vast majority of their children will be heterosexual -- apparently more accepting and less judgmental than average.
Should churches recognize committed same-sex relationships?	No. Gay relationships are an abomination, hated by God.	Perhaps. Some feel that all loving, committed adult relationships should be recognized and supported.
Should same-sex couples given benefits now given to opposite-sex married couples?	No. Same-sex marriages or civil unions threaten regular families and thus the stability of society.	Yes. Official recognition of their relationship and government benefits are a fundamental civil right. The union of two people have no bearing on the union of anyone else.
Should gays be eligible for ordination as clergy?	No. It would be a major lowering of standards. It would condone seriously sinful behavior.	Yes. One's orientation has no bearing on the ability to be a priest, minister or pastor.

Some additional beliefs by religious conservatives are:

- Some conservative Christians believe that a homosexual's feelings of attraction to members of the same sex will dissipate once they trust Jesus as Lord and Savior and are saved. They base this on a Biblical passage: *1 Corinthians 6:11*. One interpretation of that verse is that some of the recipients of his letter to the church at Corinth were homosexuals before they became Christians, but were converted to heterosexuality after becoming saved.
- Some religious conservatives believe that homosexual behavior is an addiction similar to drugs and alcohol. It is to be avoided at all costs, as is, dancing, playing cards and going to movies.
- All efforts to treat homosexuality as a normal and natural practice must be resisted. Otherwise, more youth will experiment with it and get trapped in the lifestyle.



- Some religious conservatives believe that the institution of marriage was created by God thousands of years ago. They interpret the Bible as saying that marriages must only be between one man and one woman, and that any sexual behavior outside of marriage is forbidden. Thus, they feel that all same-sex sexual activity is a sin. They are aware that gays and lesbians can marry each other, in Massachusetts, Ontario, Quebec, Saskatchewan, New Brunswick, British Columbia, etc, but they do not recognize these as true marriages. They conclude that homosexuals must remain celibate.

## Studies of Sexual Orientation:

One's sexual orientation is defined by sexual attraction to men and/or women, by self-identification, and by one's sexual fantasies. Some people believe that there are only two sexual orientations:

- Heterosexual - a person who is sexually attracted **only** to members of the **opposite** gender, or
- Homosexual - a person who is sexually attracted **only** to members of the **same** gender.

This is not a useful model, because it ignores two other minorities:

- Asexuals - people who have feelings of sexual attraction to **neither** gender, and
- Bisexuals - people who are attracted (usually to different degrees) to **both** genders

Most researchers into human sexuality look upon sexual orientation as a continuum:

- Those with solely heterosexual feelings form one extreme. They are free to select celibacy, or to seek sexual activity with members of the opposite sex.
- Those with solely homosexual feelings form the other extreme. They are free to enter into relationships with members of their own sex; some can choose to remain celibate.
- In the middle are bisexuals. Being sexually attracted to both genders they can choose:
  - Only heterosexual relationships
  - Only homosexual relationships
  - Relationships with both men and women
  - Celibacy

Most human sexuality researchers believe that one's orientation is fixed and unchangeable. Exceptions are those "specialists" in human sexuality who are also religious conservatives. Many are members of the National Association for Research and Therapy of Homosexuality (NARTH), a small professional organization that promotes conservative religious beliefs about homosexuality.

A number of techniques have been used to try to suppress homosexual feelings and/or create heterosexual feelings in gays and lesbians: 12

- Lesbians had their breasts amputated.
- Lesbians had their perfectly healthy uteri removed.
- Male gays were given aversion therapy; e.g. clients were shown pictures of naked men and simultaneously shocked with electricity.

Other "treatments" included:

- brain surgery in the form of frontal lobotomies.
- castration.
- counseling and psychotherapy.
- drug therapy: e.g. animal-organ extracts, cocaine, estrogen, testosterone.
- positive therapy: e.g. men were asked to masturbate and then were shown pictures of women just before orgasm.
- prayer and spiritual counseling.
- therapy by tedium: men were shown homoerotic pictures until they became totally bored.
- During the Nazi regime in Germany, Himmler attempted to "cure" gays by requiring them to visit the camp brothel at Flossenbug. *"Ten Ravensbruck women provided the services with little success. The women [were later]...shipped to Auschwitz"* for execution.
- During the recent apartheid regime in South Africa, gays and lesbians were considered deviants. They were sent to a special ward of a military hospital to be "*rehabilitated*." This involved electric shock treatments and chemical castration. Those who could not be "*cured*" were given sex-change operations. A number of "*patients*" died.

The success rate of these therapies in actually changing clients' sexual orientation appears to have been between 0% and something less than 0.1%. The success rate at changing clients' sexual behavior is much greater. Some of these techniques can persuade homosexuals to be celibate, either through terror, guilt, or persuasion that God considers same-sex behavior to be an abomination. They can persuade bisexuals to confine their sexual activities to members of the opposite sex. They may even be able to train gays to successfully have sex with a woman, while fantasize about making love to another man. But therapies do not seem to be capable of changing one's feelings -- one's sexual orientation -- in the vast majority of people. <sup>13</sup>

## When in Life is a Person's Sexual Orientation Determined?

There appears to be no agreement between the beliefs of conservative Christians and results of scientific studies:

**Religious conservative belief:** A common theme running through literature from the larger Fundamentalist and other Evangelical Christian organizations is that homosexual behavior is unnatural, abnormal, and despised by God as an abomination. This is echoed by many Jewish and Muslim writers. They derive this from their interpretation of some key biblical passages. They also believe that a person chooses their sexual orientation after puberty. Some individuals then experiment with homosexual behavior, and quickly become addicted to it. Because of this belief, many conservative Christians are opposed to positive representations of lesbian and gay characters on TV. (*Ellen, Friends, Will & Grace, Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*....). They feel that any move towards accepting homosexual orientation and behavior as normal and natural will cause more youth to experiment with same-sex relationships. Religious conservatives also frequently oppose educational programs about homosexuality, high-school support groups for gay and lesbian youth, etc. because they tend to also promote homosexuality as normal and natural for a minority of persons.

## Scientific studies:

- **Detection of homosexual propensity in children:** Richard Green, a psychiatrist from UCLA has compared effeminate with "masculine" boys. <sup>14</sup> Children who grow up to become homosexuals often engage in "*gender inappropriate play*" in early childhood. <sup>15</sup> "*'Feminine' boys played about four times as much with the doll...a third as much with the truck .*" By interviewing their child subjects later in life when they were in their teens and early twenties, the researchers found that 75% of the effeminate boys had become gay adult males. It is obvious that these boys were not taught this behavior. They did not copy their behavior from other children in the family; they were often under harsh and severe pressure from their parents to change. One reasonable conclusion is that that they are driven to this type of behavior by an innate trait which is outside of their control and consciousness.
- **Cross-cultural study:** Whitham and Mathy studied 375 homosexual men in Brazil, Guatemala, Peru, the Philippines, Thailand and the United States. <sup>16</sup> They consistently found that 25% of homosexual men display highly gender atypical behavior, while 50% showed marked gender atypical behavior as young children. They played with what are normally considered girls' toys and were regarded as sissies. These studies also find the same effect among adult lesbians; however, the percentages are much lower.

These types of studies indicate that the factor or factors which determine sexual orientation often effect very early in a child's life (perhaps before birth). <sup>17</sup>

## Family Types Mentioned in the Bible:

God is recorded as promoting the concept of marriage in Genesis 2:18: Referring to Adam, "*...the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him.*" (King James Version - KJV) "*Help meet*" also appears in the *Jerusalem Bible*. It is translated "*helper*" in many other translations (e.g. *Amplified Bible*, *An American Translation*, *James Moffatt Translation*, *New American Standard Bible*, *New Century Version*, *New International Version*, *New World Translation*, *Revised Standard Bible*, *Young's Literal Translation*. The *Living Bible*, *New Living Translation*, and *Today's English Version* use a phrase like "*a suitable companion to help him.*" The original Hebrew word, when used to refer to humans, implies a partnership of two equals, rather than a relationship between persons of unequal status. "*Co-worker*" or "*partner*" might be a better translation. The *Contemporary English Version*, *New American Bible*, and *Revised English Bible* use the term "*partner*" indicating an equal status between Adam and Eve.

We have found eight types of marriages mentioned in the Bible:

1. **The standard nuclear family:** Genesis 2:24 describes how a man leaves his family of origin, joins with a woman, consummates the marriage and lives as a couple. There were quite a few differences between the customs and laws of contemporary North Americans and of ancient Israelites. In ancient Israel:
  - Inter-faith marriages were theoretically forbidden. However, they were sometimes formed.
  - Children of inter-faith marriages were considered illegitimate.
  - Marriages were generally arranged by family or friends; they did not result from a gradually

evolving, loving relationship that developed during a period of courtship.

- A bride who had been presented as a virgin and who could not be proven to be one was stoned to death by the men of her village. (Deuteronomy 22:13-21) There appears to have been no similar penalty for men who engaged in consensual pre-marital sexual activity.

2. **Polygyny marriage:** A man would leave his family of origin and join with his first wife. Then, as finances allowed, he would marry as many additional women as he desired. The new wives would join the man and his other wives in an already established household. Polygyny was practiced by members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the Mormons, until the practice was suspended, at least temporarily, in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. It is still practiced by separated fundamentalist Mormon groups which have been excommunicated from the main church.

There are many references to polygynous marriages in the Bible:

- Lamech, in Genesis 4:19, became the first known polygynist. He had two wives.
- Subsequent men in polygynous relationships included:
  - Esau with 3 wives;
  - Jacob: 2;
  - Ashur: 2;
  - Gideon: many;
  - Elkanah: 2;
  - David: many;
  - Solomon had 700 wives of royal birth;
  - Rehoboam: 3;
  - Abijah: 14.
  - Jehoram, Joash, Ahab, Jeholachin and Belshazzar also had multiple wives.
- From the historical record, it is known that Herod the Great (73 to 4 BCE) had nine wives.

We have been unable to find references to polyandrous marriages in the Bible -- unions involving one woman and more than one man. It is unlikely that many existed because of the distinctly inferior status given to women; they were often treated as property in the Hebrew Scriptures.

3. **Levirate Marriage:** The name of this type of marriage is derived from the Latin word "*levir*," which means "*brother-in-law*." This involved a woman who was widowed without having borne a son. She would be required to leave her home, marry her brother-in-law, live with him, and engage in sexual relations. If there were feelings of attraction and love between the woman and her new husband, this arrangement could be quite agreeable to both. Otherwise, the woman would have to endure what was essentially serial rapes with her former brother-in-law as perpetrator. Their first-born son was considered to be sired by the deceased husband. In Genesis 38:6-10, Tamar's husband Er was killed by God for unspecified sinful behavior. Er's brother, Onan, was then required by custom to marry Tamar. Not wanting to have a child who would not be considered his, he engaged in an elementary (and quite unreliable) method of birth control: coitus interruptus. God appears to have given a very high priority to the levirate

4 reveals that a man would be required to enter into a levirate marriage not only with his late brother's widow, but with a widow to whom he was the closest living relative.

4. **A man, a woman and her property -- a female slave:** As described in Genesis 16, Sarah and Abram were infertile. Sarah owned Hagar, a female slave who apparently had been purchased earlier in Egypt. Because Hagar was Sarah's property, she could dispose of her as she wished. Sarah gave Hagar to Abram as a type of wife, so that Abram would have an heir. Presumably, the arrangement to marry and engage in sexual activity was done without the consent of Hagar, who had such a low status in the society of the day that she was required to submit to what she probably felt were serial rapes by Abram. Hagar conceived and bore a son, Ishmael. This type of marriage had some points of similarity to polygamous marriage, as described above. However, Hagar's status as a human slave in a plural marriage with two free individuals makes it sufficiently different to warrant separate treatment here.
5. **A man, one or more wives, and some concubines:** A man could keep numerous concubines, in addition to one or more wives. These women held an even lower status than a wife. As implied in Genesis 21:10, a concubine could be dismissed when no longer wanted. According to Smith's Bible Dictionary, "*A concubine would generally be either (1) a Hebrew girl bought...[from] her father; (2) a Gentile captive taken in war; (3) a foreign slave bought; or (4) a Canaanitish woman, bond or free.*" <sup>10</sup> They would probably be brought into an already-established household. Abraham had two concubines; Gideon: at least 1; Nahor: 1; Jacob: 1; Eliphaz: 1; Gideon: 1; Caleb: 2; Manassah: 1; Saul: 1; David: at least 10; Rehoboam: 60; Solomon: 300!; an unidentified Levite: 1; Belshazzar: more than 1.
6. **A male soldier and a female prisoner of war:** Numbers 31:1-18 describes how the army of the ancient Israelites killed every adult Midianite male in battle. Moses then ordered the slaughter in cold blood of most of the captives, including all of the male children who numbered about 32,000. Only the lives of 32,000 women - all virgins -- were spared. Some of the latter were given to the priests as slaves. Most were taken by the Israeli soldiers as captives of war. Deuteronomy 21:11-14 describes how each captive woman would shave her head, pare her nails, be left alone to mourn the loss of her families, friends, and freedom. After a full month had passed, they would be required to submit to their owners sexually, as a wife. It is conceivable that in a few cases, a love bond might have formed between the soldier and his captive(s). However, in most cases we can assume that the woman had to submit sexually against her will; that is, she was raped.
7. **A male rapist and his victim:** Deuteronomy 22:28-29 requires that a female virgin who is not engaged to be married and who has been raped must marry her attacker, no matter what her feelings were towards the rapist. A man could become married by simply sexually attacking a woman that appealed to him, and paying his father-in-law 50 shekels of silver. There is one disadvantage of this approach: he was not allowed to subsequently divorce her.
8. **A male and female slave:** Exodus 21:4 indicates that a slave owner could assign one of his female slaves to one of his male slaves as a wife. There is no indication that women were consulted during this type of transaction. The arrangement would probably involve rape in most cases. In the times of the Hebrew Scriptures, Israelite women who were sold into slavery by their fathers were slaves forever. Men, and women who became slaves by another route, were limited to serving as slaves for seven years. When a male slave left his owner, the marriage would normally be terminated; his wife would stay behind, with any children that she had. He could elect to stay a slave if he wished

## ***Why are conservative Protestants so opposed to gay rights, while liberals are in favor of equal rights for all?***

### **Difference of Opinion:**

The Southern Baptist Convention, (along with other denominations within the conservative wing of Protestantism) and the United Church of Christ, (along with other liberal faith groups), all consider themselves to be Christians. They all use the contents of the Bible as a main foundation for their beliefs. Why have they reached such different conclusions concerning:

- The morality or immorality of same-sex behavior;
- Whether sexually active homosexuals should be allowed as members or clergy;
- Whether loving same-sex committed couples should have their relationships recognized by a church ritual similar to a marriage ceremony.
- Whether same-sex committed couples should be allowed to marry in the church where it is legal to do so.

### **Understanding the Different Beliefs:**

One approach to understanding this difference of opinion is to consider how each wing of Protestantism develops their religious beliefs. Whether expressed by Christian individuals or denominations, their convictions are mostly based on a blend of four factors. In the case of homosexuality, this involves:

- What the Bible actually says about homosexual behavior;
- The historical position of the denomination on homosexuality;
- Personal observation and experience from one's involvement with homosexuals; and
- Rational study -- the findings of researchers working in genetics, child psychology, human sexuality, etc.

It is important to realize that conservative and liberal Christians place different emphasis on the four factors. Generally speaking:

- Conservatives rely mostly on the content of the Bible, as they interpret it to mean. "*Sola Scriptura*" ("Scripture alone") was one of the rallying cries of the Protestant Reformation. "*Quod non est biblicum, non est theologicum*" ("What is not biblical is not theological") was one of its slogans.<sup>1</sup> They give far less emphasis to the findings of researchers. In this case, the findings of researchers are generally rejected because they conflict with their interpretation of the Bible. Relying on their interpretation of the Bible can be disastrous. Consider the debate over slavery in the mid 19th century. In those days, some denominations enthusiastically quoted biblical passages to support the owning of human slaves as pieces of property.
- Liberals give far greater weight to the findings of scientific research, and are willing to abandon the traditional interpretation of biblical passages in favor of new analyses which harmonize the Bible and scientific discoveries. This also can be disastrous from time to time. Although



science is inherently self correcting, sometimes scientists develop theories which deviate wildly from reality, are inaccurate, and cause harm. Always remember that one of the recipients of the Nobel Prize for medicine was the physician who developed frontal lobotomies.

## Typical Conservative Protestant Beliefs about Homosexuality:

Conservative Christians generally believe that the Bible authors were inspired by God to write text that is inerrant -- free of error. They often quote the Bible's seven passages -- often called "clobber passages" which have traditionally been used to condemn homosexuality. They have generally concluded that the Bible clearly and consistently condemns all homosexual behavior, no matter what the nature of the relationship is:

- **Genesis 19** discusses God's destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah in response to the rampant homosexuality of the men in the two cities.
- **Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13** clearly condemns same-sex behavior; it is described as an abomination. The latter passage actually calls for the death penalty for sexually active homosexuals.
- Various passages in **Deuteronomy, Judges** and **Kings** also condemn homosexuality.
- **1 Corinthians 6** condemns "*homosexual offenders*," "*homosexuals*," "*sodomites*," or "*abusers of themselves with mankind*," depending upon the English translation used. Such will not "*inherit the kingdom of God*" -- they will not attain Heaven after death.
- **Romans 1** condemns both men and women engaging in same-sex behavior. Bennett Sims, the former Episcopal bishop of Atlanta, believes that these verses have done more to form conservative Christians' negative opinion of homosexuality than any other single passage in the Bible. He writes: "*For most of us who seriously honor Scripture these verses still stand as the capital New Testament text that unequivocally prohibits homosexual behavior. More prohibitively, this text has been taken to mean that even a same-sex inclination is reprehensible, so that a type of humanity known as 'homosexual' has steadily become the object of contempt and discrimination.*" <sup>2</sup>
- **1 Timothy 1** contains thoughts similar to Romans 1.
- **Jude 1:7** reinforces Genesis 19 and condemns the men of Sodom and Gomorrah for their desire to have sex with male visitors -- described in various Bible translations as "*perversion*" "*perverted sensuality*," "*unnatural lust*," "*unnatural sex*," "*lust of men for other men*," and "*pursued unnatural desire*."

Their conclusion is obvious: homosexuality is consistently condemned throughout the Bible. Further, they interpret 1 Corinthians 6 as showing that homosexuals can be cured and converted to heterosexuality by first being saved.

They generally believe that the proper approach of a Christian to a homosexual is to convince him to be converted to heterosexuality either through reparative therapy or by becoming saved.

## Typical Liberal Protestant beliefs about Homosexuality:

Liberal Christians generally reject the inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible. They acknowledge that the Bible consists mainly of material promoting the authors' evolving beliefs. To that is added text imported from nearby Pagan cultures, some religious propaganda, and some material -- like the execution of rape victims, religious minorities, and homosexuals; forced divorce of inter-faith couples; genocides; etc. -- which they view as definitely against the will of God.

Rather than concentrating on the seven "clobber" passages, they derive their beliefs from biblical themes of love, caring for other humans, inclusiveness, and justice. When they do study the "clobber" passages they often interpret them very differently and conclude that the Bible is silent on loving, committed consensual same-sex relationships. Typical interpretations are:

- **Genesis 19** discusses the city residents' intent to rape strangers.
- **Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13** condemns same-sex behavior, but only in Pagan temples.
- Various passages in **Deuteronomy**, **Judges** and **Kings** condemn prostitution.
- **1 Corinthians 6** condemns child molesters.
- **Romans 1** describes heterosexuals going against their nature by engaging in same-sex behavior.
- **1 Timothy 1** contains thoughts similar to Romans 1.
- **Jude 1:7** accuses the men of Sodom of intent to commit bestiality: having forcible sex with a non-human species -- angels in this case.

Their conclusion is obvious: The Bible condemns same-sex abuse -- rape, desecrating holy places, prostitution, child molestation, bestiality and sexual activity against one's basic nature. It is silent on consensual same-sex activity by persons with a homosexual or bisexual relationship within a loving committed relationship.

They generally believe that the proper approach of a Christian to homosexuality is to:

- Help them accept their sexual orientation as ethically neutral, normal, natural and unchangeable.
- Work to end oppression of gays, lesbians, and bisexuals; and
- Work to end special privileges for heterosexuals -- like the right to marry.
- Reject reparative therapy as ineffectual and unsafe.

## Opinion Expressed by John S. Spong:

*Waterfront Media* publishes a regular Email newsletter in which retired bishop John S. Spong answers questions submitted by the public. <sup>3</sup> "SXL" wondered about the growth of conservative Protestant denominations and was *"rather appalled that their 'love' for humanity does not include homosexuals"* and other groups. The asked Spong's opinion about the future of these groups in the U.S. <sup>4</sup>

J.S. Spong suggested that religious fundamentalism is a mechanism to generate security and stability in its members who live in a culture that is in rapid change. Unfortunately it requires that some group be demonized. Currently, the group selected are persons with a homosexual orientation. He writes, in part:

"I think that we have in recent years entered a 'New Dark Age' in the Western world. It is marked by the rise of religious systems that seek to build security by encouraging prejudice against a designated victim. Both evangelical fundamentalism and the kind of ultra-conservative Roman Catholicism that is at present installed in the Vatican are publicly defined by their visceral and uninformed hostility toward homosexual persons. What the heretic was in the Middle Ages, the black in the days of slavery and segregation, and the Jew in Nazi Germany, the homosexual has become in the religious hysteria of our day. This kind of behavior is always a response to fear and to a rapidly changing world. Security-providing religion, which always requires a victim, is like a drug that carries us over the rough places of life. It is certainly not the wave of the Christian future....Beyond that I think we ought to recognize that truth and unity cannot ever be built on identifying a victim that creates the illusion of unity because there is a common enemy. When these institutions say that God hates the same things that the worshiper hates, everyone should be very suspicious."

"Dark Ages do not last forever. Ten years from now this phase of our religious history will surely be over. The contemporary scientific and medical data that suggests that homosexuality is a perfectly normal but minority aspect of our humanity, that it is a given and not a chosen aspect of life, will have challenged these prejudices so deeply as to make them seem not only quaint but ignorant. Remember that less than one hundred years ago we were still persecuting left-handed people as evil, deviant and unnatural. In the meantime I share your enormous embarrassment that the Christian church is today the major voice in the Western World in the persecution of those members of our society whose only 'sin' is that they were born with a sexual orientation different from the majority. 5 Someday we will be terribly ashamed of the Christian leaders in our generation." 4

If Bishop Spong is correct, then fundamentalists will have to move on, leaving homosexuals to demonize another group -- perhaps Muslims, or Witches, other Neopagans, or some other religious group.

## **The Nature of Homosexuality and Bisexuality**

### **A Conversation:**

Question: To a lesbian from a woman grieving over the death of her husband: "*Do your people feel sad when your partner dies?*"

Answer: "*You see me as a little less human, and for me to realize it, breaks my heart.*"

### **Two Definitions of "Homosexuality:"**

Religious conservatives often define homosexuality in terms of behavior. Homosexuality and heterosexuality is what a person *does*. A homosexual is a person who engages in some same-gender sexual behavior; a heterosexual is one who engages only in opposite-gender sexual behavior.

A person who has sex with both males and females, is also considered a homosexual. One who is sexually inactive, is considered a heterosexual. Behaviors can be changed by an act of will:

- Persons who are sexually attracted to both men and women can choose to confine their activity to opposite-sex relationships. They are often described as "*having left the homosexual lifestyle*" or as being "ex-gays."
- Persons who are sexually attracted to members of the opposite sex can decide to remain celibate. They are also described as "having left the homosexual lifestyle" and as being "ex-gays."
- By changing one's behavior, they can switch from being homosexual to being heterosexual.

Most religious liberals, gays, lesbians, bisexuals, human sexuality researchers, therapists, etc. define homosexuality in terms of feelings and self-identification.

- A homosexual is a person who is sexually attracted only to members of the same sex.
- A bisexual is attracted to both women and men, although not necessarily to the same degree.
- A heterosexual is a person who is attracted only to persons of the opposite sex.
- Bisexuals can choose to confine their activity to one sex or the other; however they still remain bisexual.
- Homosexuals can choose to remain celibate; however they still remain homosexual.
- Adult sexual orientation is generally regarded as fixed; it cannot be changed through therapy or prayer.

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18. William Sloane Coffin, "*Commentary: It's clear that homophobia was reason for ad's rejection*," United Church News, 2004-DEC-15, at: <http://news.ucc.org/>
19. Rabbi Gershon Caudill, "*A Heterosexual Jewish Rebbe's View on the (Supposedly) Homosexual Texts in the Hebrew Bible*," at: <http://www.affirmation.org/>
20. ThNGPA has merged with *Apostolic Intercessory Ministry*; both groups are now known as *Apostolic Restoration Mission*. See: <http://www.apostolicrestorationmission.4t.com/>